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Schweiker, Richard S.
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SALT Treaty:

A matter of verification

By Sen. Richard S. Schweiker

Debate about verification of Soviet compliance with SALT II misses the bottom line when it focuses solely on U.S. monitoring capabilities and overlooks the extent to which the treaty's provisions can or will be enforced.

Effective strategic arms control depends largely on the ability of each party to verify independently the other's compliance with the agreements. Reliable monitoring procedures are essential to enhance confidence in the limitations on strategic nuclear forces and to guard against the "creeping circumventions" which could change the prevailing military balance.

Discussion of the verifiability of SALT II has tended to focus primarily on how adequately the treaty can be monitored by current U.S. "national technical means," such as photo-reconnaissance satellites and electronic intelligence gathering systems.

This concentration on narrow technical criteria is insufficient. Resolving the complex verification question demands that due consideration be given an equally critical, though more subtle aspect: the extent to which the treaty's provisions would be effectively enforced.

Since arms control is part of a broader political relationship between the superpowers, it follows that enforcement of specific agreements will involve political judgments about sometimes ambiguous technical data. No matter how sophisticated our intelligence capabilities, therefore, the verifiability of SALT II ultimately depends on the nature of our potential responses to alleged Soviet violations.

Yet how willing would an administration be to enforce a treaty in whose negotiation and continued viability it has a pronounced political stake? Given the enormous importance President Carter has attached to SALT ratification, it would not be unreasonable to speculate that the political incentives to suppress or downplay evidence of Soviet violations not considered strategically "significant" would be quite strong.

The manner in which verification is defined with respect to SALT II raises disturbing questions. Whereas adequate verification once required an assurance from U.S. intelligence agencies that any Soviet attempts to circumvent a treaty would be detected, it now requires only that cheating serious enough to alter the strategic balance be discovered in time to assure an appropriate U.S. response.

The basis for determining adequacy therefore becomes quite subjective, depending on one's perception of the strategic balance and what kinds of treaty violations would be destabilizing.

There is, of course, no guarantee that "strategically significant" cheating would be detected in a timely manner, if at all. Moreover, there is no necessary correlation between a treaty item's verifiability and its strategic significance. Even apparently minor Soviet circumventions, if undetected or tolerated for political reasons, could pose potentially dangerous strategic risks.

So where and when does one draw the line in deciding which kinds of violations (assuming they can be discovered) are both strategically significant and politically acceptable? Or does the conclusion of a long-sought arms control treaty justify side-stepping crucial "gray areas" that may affect *both* the strategic balance and the treaty's overall verifiability?

The compromise under which Soviet missile test telemetry "unrelated to SALT" may be encrypted is indicative of the type of problems created by quick-fix solutions to longer-term political and strategic issues. The telemetric data received from missile flight tests enable the U.S. to gauge certain qualitative characteristics, such as range, warhead accuracy, and throw-weight.

Previous Soviet practice of encoding some of the data was originally rebuked by the U.S. as a possible violation of the ban on "deliberate concealment measures" which could impede SALT verification.

But now the Soviets are to be permitted to decide which telemetry can be encoded. How can the U.S. be certain some of the data are not related to SALT verification and are not strategically significant? How does one know what one does not know? The administration claims all telemetry is required for verification purposes and that, in any event, we will apply a strict standard in determining the nature of the information being

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denied us by Soviet encryption.

Such an intriguing stance begs certain inevitable questions. Given the anticipated Soviet rebuttal to any charge that something illicit may have occurred, how do we prove that the encrypted telemetry is significant, especially when in many cases we might not even be certain what it was we were attempting to prove exsted? Or would Soviet intransigence progressively result in the United States' being forced to *disprove* to skeptics that a significant violation had taken place? Moreover, how can potential political challenges to suspicious Soviet encryption practices (and Moscow's interpretation of the significance of the same) be posed in the Standing Consultative Commission (SCC) without revealing U.S. sources and methods of detection?

Beyond identifying questionable Soviet practices in the SCC, what would constitute an appropriate U.S. response to alleged violations?

When the Carter Administration asserts that Soviet violations of the pledges made on deployment of the Backfire bomber would be sufficient cause for unilateral U.S abrogation of SALT II, the threat lacks credibility. This is because the treaty's domestic political importance, as well as the administration's belief that detente without SALT is impossible, argue against their adopting what would ultimately considered an illegitimate response. Indeed, a willingness to rationalize "minor" incidents might well increase if larger political interests were perceived to be threatened by aggressively pursuing suspicious Soviet activities.

The recent controversy over the presence of a Soviet combat brigade in Cuba is instructive. After stating that the "status quo" was "unacceptable," the President, despite earlier claiming "persuasive evidence," chose to acquiesce and implied that a firmer response would have meant "a return to the Cold War," and the end of SALT.

In the process of taking certain compensatory measures, the "status quo" was redefined to reflect unilateral American actions, instead of indicating any Soviet move to redress the initial provocation. Can it be confidently predicted that the administration wouldn't react similarly in the face of repeated Soviet denials of certain questionable activities related to SALT II itself?

Our willingness to enforce SALT II is the key to determining the pact's verifiability. The Senate's obligation to examine thoroughly our technical verification capabilities should not be allowed to obscure the importance of, or deflect attention from, the enforcement issue, which, like the treaty itself, is ultimately political.

(Sen. Richard S. Schweiker represents Pennsylvania in the U.S. Senate.)

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